

NEWS RELEASE

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Multi-jurisdictional Task Force Targets Meth in Christian County Eleven Face Federal, State Charges

Springfield, IL - Jan Paul Miller, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, was joined today by Ellen Mandeltort, Deputy Illinois Attorney General for the Criminal Justice Division, and Christian County State's Attorney Brad Paisley, to announce the first charges and arrests related to an ongoing task force investigation of manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine in Christian County, Illinois.

Joining them were representatives of the multi-jurisdictional law enforcement agencies participating or working cooperatively with the ongoing Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation:

David Lenartowicz, Resident Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration,
Springfield Division;
Captain Kenneth Yelliott, Illinois State Police;
Lieutenant Cheryl Sims, Central Illinois Enforcement Group;
Bob Kindermann, Christian County Sheriff;
Greg Brotherton, Chief of the Taylorville Police Department; and,
Roger Cothorn, Chief of the Pana Police Department.

Law enforcement officers arrested those charged this morning. Seven defendants have been indicted on federal charges of conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine. Two other defendants have been charged by federal complaint, and two additional defendants were indicted by a Christian County grand jury in cooperation with the Illinois Attorney General's Office. In separate, unrelated indictments by the Christian County grand jury, several defendants were charged with methamphetamine offenses by the State's Attorney's Office.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office has assigned a special prosecutor, Delores Hurley, and an investigator to the task force. Ms. Hurley has received designation as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney to enable her to prosecute the cases in federal court as well as state court. Assistant U.S. Attorney Esteban F. Sanchez is prosecuting the federal cases.

U.S. Attorney Miller said, "This is an excellent example of federal, state, and local law enforcement working together toward a common goal. By coordinating each agency's resources, we are able to use them most effectively in a comprehensive, sustained attack against this insidious drug."

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"Methamphetamine has flooded downstate and southern Illinois. We must all work together - at the federal, state and county levels - to help stop the spread of this deadly drug," Attorney General Lisa Madigan said. "On the state level, we have a new law in effect that will work to keep criminals from buying or stealing the ingredients they need to cook meth. While this law will help, we must continue our efforts to stop the manufacture and sale of this drug. Today's announcement is an example of how we can combine resources and efforts to help end the manufacture and use of this poison"

A federal grand jury in Springfield returned two indictments on January 6, 2005, charging a total of seven defendants with conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine.

In one indictment, the charges allege that five defendants conspired together and with others, from September 3, 2003, to January 14, 2004, to manufacture and distribute 50 or more grams of methamphetamine in Christian County. The five charged are:

Eldon M. Shelton, a/k/a Butch Shelton, age 36, of 520 N. Long Street, Taylorville;
Gavin M. Walker, age 19, of 1019 W. England, Taylorville;
Michael Smothers, age 24, of Lot #3, Fairview Trailer Court, Taylorville;
David Bradley Chamness, age 39, of 710 E. Esther Street, Taylorville, Illinois; and,
Jeffrey L. Durbin, age 36, of 718 N. 16th Street, Springfield, Illinois.

As part of the conspiracy, the indictment alleges Shelton and Walker recruited others to procure pseudoephedrine pills and lithium batteries used to manufacture meth. The indictment further alleges Smothers permitted his rural Taylorville residence to be used to manufacture meth for a fee. The fee was allegedly paid to him in methamphetamine for every "1,000-pill" batch of meth manufactured there by his co-conspirators.

Charged in a separate federal indictment are **Kevin M. Johnson**, age 36, of 1130 W. Hewitt Street, and **Rebecca M. Champley**, age 29, of 901 W. Market Street, both of Taylorville, Illinois. The indictment alleges Johnson and Champley conspired together and with others to manufacture and distribute 50 or more grams of meth in Christian County from September 2003 to mid-January 2004.

Each federal indictment seeks, from the defendants charged, the criminal forfeiture of at least \$100,000, which constitutes proceeds derived from the drug offenses.

If convicted, the offenses carry statutory mandatory minimum penalties of 10 years imprisonment, and fine of up to \$4,000,000. Penalties for defendants who have a prior felony drug conviction carry a mandatory minimum 20 years imprisonment and fine of up to \$8,000,000. For defendants with two prior felony convictions, the penalty is mandatory life imprisonment.

The defendants have been arrested and are scheduled to make their initial appearances in federal court tomorrow before U.S. Magistrate Judge Byron Cudmore in Springfield.

Two additional defendants have been arrested and charged in separate federal complaints filed January 21, 2005: **Justine M. Turner**, age 39, of 720 E. Cleveland Street, Taylorville, and **Robert J. Samson**, age 19, of 605 E. Poplar Street, Taylorville, Illinois. The complaint charging Turner alleges she conspired with others to manufacture five or more grams of methamphetamine from about November 2003 to January 2004.

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If convicted, the offense carries a statutory penalty of a mandatory minimum five to 40 years imprisonment if there is no prior felony drug conviction. Samson is charged with conspiracy to manufacture 50 or more grams of methamphetamine from October 2003 to January 2004. If convicted, the offense is punishable by a mandatory minimum 10 years to life imprisonment if there is no prior felony drug conviction. Turner and Samson are also scheduled to make their initial appearance tomorrow in federal court in Springfield before U.S. Magistrate Judge Byron Cudmore.

The Illinois Attorney General's Office also secured indictments from the Christian County grand jury charging two defendants in state court. A three-count indictment charges **Douglas W. Cushing**, age 30, of 1318 W. Vandever Street, Taylorville, with unlawful manufacture of a controlled substance; unlawful possession of methamphetamine manufacturing chemical with intent to manufacture controlled substance; and possession of a controlled substance. The indictment alleges the offenses occurred on or about October 4, 2004, in Christian county. If convicted of unlawful manufacture of a controlled substance, a class X felony, the penalty is 15-60 years imprisonment; for possession of a chemical with intent to manufacture, the penalty is 4-15 years imprisonment; and for possession of a controlled substance, the penalty is one to three years imprisonment.

In a separate indictment, **Chad A. Johanningmeier**, age 38, of Owaneco, Illinois, is charged with one count of unlawful possession of a controlled substance. The indictment alleges Johanningmeier possessed less than 15 grams of a substance containing meth on or about August 9, 2004, in Christian county, Illinois. If convicted, the penalty is one to three years imprisonment.

Members of the public are reminded that indictments and complaints are merely accusations; the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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